

Love them. Protect them. Immunize them.

Working together with Vaccination Week in the Americas

Vaccination: an act of love



Frequently Asked Questions

Why should infants be vaccinated?

Infants need to be vaccinated because they are more likely to develop complications or die from vaccine-preventable diseases. Vaccines provide long-lasting protection against many diseases. Immunization is one of the most important things a parent can do to protect their children's health. Today we can protect young children from 13 potentially serious diseases. Failure to vaccinate may mean putting children at risk for serious diseases.

Are vaccines safe?

Vaccines are very safe and effective. Like any other medicine, they can occasionally cause mild reactions like a sore arm or a slight fever. Serious reactions are very rare. The important thing to remember is that getting the diseases is *much* more dangerous than getting the vaccine.

When should my child's vaccines begin?

The first vaccine, HepB is given at birth. Most vaccines are given before children are two years old but they will need more vaccines before starting school and as they get older. The ages at which vaccines are recommended are chosen to give children the earliest and best protection against diseases.

Why do infants need so many shots?

There are 13 potentially serious diseases that vaccines protect against: Bacterial Meningitis, Diphtheria, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, Influenza, Measles, Mumps, Pertussis (Whooping Cough), Pneumococcal Disease, Polio, Rubella (German Measles), Tetanus (lockjaw), and Varicella (Chickenpox).

At least one vaccine is needed for each of these diseases, and for some several doses are required for the best protection. Several "combination vaccines" exist in which multiple vaccines are given in a single shot, reducing the number of shots needed.

What would happen if my child *didn't* get these shots?

Basically, one of two things could happen:

1. If your child were to go through life without ever being exposed to any of these diseases, nothing would happen. The chances of this happening are rare.
2. If your child were exposed to any of these diseases, there is a good chance they would get the disease. Your child could get mildly ill and have to stay inside for a few days or could get very sick and have to be hospitalized. At the very worst, your child could die.

Your child could spread the disease to other children and adults who are not immune. When there are enough unprotected people in a community, the result can be an outbreak of the disease.

What are my child's chances of being exposed to these diseases?

Some of these diseases are very rare in the United States today, so the chances of exposure are small. Others are still fairly common. Some are rare in the United States but common elsewhere in the world. Don't assume your child is completely safe from any of these diseases, even the rare ones.

Do vaccines always work?

Vaccines work most of the time. Most infant immunizations give immunity to 90%-99% of the children who get them. But occasionally a child will not respond to certain vaccines. A child who has not responded to vaccination has to depend on the immunity of others for protection. Children who haven't been vaccinated could infect your child, but not one who has been immunized.

What if my child didn't start his shots on time, or gets behind schedule? Will they still work?

To give your child the best protection be sure to immunize them on time. However, most of these vaccines can be given at any age and an infant who has fallen behind does not have to start over. The vaccines already given will still count, and the child will still develop immunity.

Are vaccines expensive?

If you go to a private doctor, vaccines might be covered by your health insurance. Or a program called "Vaccines for Children" (VFC) provides vaccines at no cost for children from birth to 18 years of age who are enrolled in Medicaid, don't have health insurance, or are American Indian or Alaska Native. VFC may cover your child if your health insurance does not cover vaccines; you can take your child to a federally qualified health center or a rural health clinic. You may have to pay a small fee for the nurse to give the vaccine.

Where can I get more information?

Talk with your healthcare provider or call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) INFO Contact Center at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636). You can also go to the National Immunization Program Website at www.cdc.gov/nip.